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Embodying sense memory: archive image and traumatic experience in *Son of Saul*, *Warsaw Uprising* and *Regina*

Beja Margitházi 

Department of Film Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

ABSTRACT

Recent cinematic evocations and transnational academic interest in the Holocaust and World War II atrocities have raised a sensibility to the affective qualities of historical trauma and generated questions about the mediation of archival sources in a post-witness era. László Nemes' award winning feature film (*Saul fia/Son of Saul*, 2014), as well as Diána Groó's poetic documentary (*Regina*, 2013) and Jan Komasa's war documentary (*Powstanie Warszawskie/Warsaw Uprising*, 2014) were inspired by visual and written archive documents produced by eyewitnesses of the historical events evoked. Associating these three films to the 'empathy mode' of memory transmission, described by Aleida Assmann (2015, 32–37), this article argues that these films use a special strategy of contacting the 'sense memory' (Bennett 2003, 28–29) of traumatic events, preserved in the black and white, silent archival photographic and filmic documents. The author states that the movies perform three different types of 'post memory work' to recall and audio-visually remediate the deep, sensual aspects of these past traumas.

KEYWORDS

Visual archive; trauma; documentary; photography; sense memory; Holocaust; WWII; Eastern European cinema

The growing temporal distance does not seem to moderate transnational academic and cinematic interest in the Holocaust legacy and World War II events. At the same time, movies dealing with the cultural and ethical implications of this traumatic heritage are shaped by various postmillennial economic and social transformations, and thus are simultaneously affected by an historical and a contemporary cultural and medial embeddedness. Inspired by Freud's 'latency hypothesis' on the temporal delay between the traumatic event and its processing, Thomas Elsaesser in his article 'Postmodernism as Mourning Work' (2001) examined Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) and Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) as late processing of the Holocaust trauma, and pointed to the necessity of a trauma theory in order 'to understand the nature of delays (...) and to be able to pose the question: why this or that film *now*?' (2001, 195) Elsaesser also recalls the idea of breaking the 'limits of representation' by agreeing with Cathy Caruth, that overcoming trauma means an ability to narrate it by evoking personal memories, telling family stories and unfolding the hidden aspects of public-historical events. Thus, to narrate trauma procreates an intimate intersection of different temporalities; literary or cinematic representations in Elsaesser's opinion, not only link 'several temporalities, making them coexist within the *same perceptual and somatic field*', suspending the distinction between psychic and chronological time, but

CONTACT Beja Margitházi  margithazi.beata@btk.elte.hu

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also produce a ‘reversal of *affect* and meaning’ (2001, 197, emphasis added). Elsaesser also warns of the dangers of interpreting media and film representations as directly referential and authentic evocations of historical truth, yet emphasizes the sensual and affective potential of mediated trauma, later unfolded by such authors as Jill Bennett (2005) and Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson (2013).

Some recent Eastern European films have engaged directly with the sensual and affective qualities of historical traumas, as we see in László Nemes’ *Son of Saul* (2014), which is definitely an outstanding, but not a solitary, example of sensual evocations of individual and collective experiences of WWII trauma. In common with *Son of Saul*, Diána Groó’s Hungarian documentary, *Regina* (2013), and Jan Komasa’s Polish war documentary, *Warsaw Uprising* (2014), were also inspired by unique visual (and written) war documents created by the victims of German atrocities. *Son of Saul* recalls events documented in *The Scrolls of Auschwitz*¹ and invokes the Sonderkommando photographs taken in August 1944; *Regina*’s initial visual source was the two surviving photographs of Regina Jonas (1902–1944) the world’s first woman rabbi, while Komasa used the original newsreel footage filmed during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. All three movies work with a combination of documentary and fictitious elements, and present three different, experimental strategies of engagement with the archival sources. These call genre boundaries into question: *Son of Saul*, a narrative fiction film mixes experimental and mainstream generic practices (Vincze 2015, 120), *Warsaw Uprising* injects fictive characters through dialogues in restored archive footage, and *Regina* can be placed in-between a ‘poetic’ documentary and an ‘experimental’ film (see Kerner 2011, 225–279).

In this article, I will examine these three movies as typical products of a postmillennial transforming memory culture, conceptualized by Aleida Assmann (2015) as a ‘post memory’ era, when new ‘frames of memory transmission’ have emerged (Assmann 2015). My analysis aims to discover those cinematic, aural and visual techniques by which the three films have framed, adopted, enhanced or animated their archival, analog photographic sources. I will identify these processes as medial ‘post memory work,’ and I will argue that, despite their formal, stylistic, generic and thematic differences, these films have a special, phenomenological involvement with a so-called ‘sense memory’ in common (Bennett 2003) of the traumatic experiences evoked. Focusing on the medial and corporeal embodiment of this ‘sense memory,’ I will explore how Komasa’s and Groó’s non-fiction films and Nemes’ feature film, not only sought new ways of speaking about violence and loss, but also actively reflected upon their own celluloid-based (*Son of Saul*), digitally retouched (*Warsaw Uprising*) and photo-cinematic (*Regina*) medium in the creation of vivid, post memory trauma senscapes. Although all these mnemotechnic concepts initially were elaborated in close relation to Holocaust remembrance and Holocaust trauma, I propose the extension of Assmann’s and Bennett’s term in a larger, war related and post-traumatic memory context.²

Holocaust, war trauma and post memory culture

As the generation of eyewitnesses and survivors is passing away, new Holocaust cinema is increasingly characterized by the proliferation of different forms of mediated memory. Discourse about the right way and form of Holocaust representation has a long and rich history, since traumatic events and their recall has raised irresolvable epistemological and moral contradictions, seriously challenging the ‘limits of representation’ (see Friedländer 1992). In their

edited volume on Holocaust cinema in the twenty-first century, Oleksandr Kobrynsky and Gerd Bayer pointed to the fact that critical discourses on questioning the possibility and the legitimacy of representing the Holocaust (marked by Theodor Adorno's, Elie Wiesel's or Claude Lanzmann's strong disagreements) gave place to an interest in the different modes of representation, the formal and ethical paradigms, particularly the different strategies and techniques by which traumatic memories can be kept alive (Bayer and Kobrynsky 2015, 2). Postmillennial Holocaust cinema shows new characteristics: it covers new historical grounds, unfolds hidden and specific aspects (e.g. the Sonderkommando, the responsibility of the civilian population, etc.) and begins to break with old stereotypes (e.g. the 'passive Jewish victim'). Kobrynsky and Bayer also registered the tendency of expressed consciousness about the limits of audio-visual representation, a self-reflexivity on cinematic mediatedness (2015, 4–5), and the growing role of visual archive, especially the insertion of photographs into films (2015, 7), a gesture signaling the mediated nature of commemoration explicitly.

Recent Holocaust cinema has also been affected by the new temporal stage of Holocaust remembrance. As any living, communicational connection with the survivors is gradually fading out, the post-witness era brings new 'frames of memory transmission' (Assmann 2015, 32). Aleida Assmann identified three of these: near identification mode (characteristic for the children of survivors), and ethical mode (appearing typically in the second generation of Germans), third, the appearance of 'empathy mode,'³ which offers an affective involvement open for everybody without any special personal, familiar or national linkage. This new frame of memory raises sensibility for the suffering, helping the observer to imagine her- or himself in the same pain, but also being able to keep the difference between the self and the other, inasmuch as 'empathy mode (...) reconstructs the trauma of the Holocaust from the perspective of the victim' (Assmann 2015, 34). If we have lived lately in an era of 'post memory,' defined by Marianne Hirsch as a temporarily and qualitatively different second-generation memory, experienced only through stories and images (see Hirsch 2001, 9), the new century for Assmann is the era of 'post memory,' when all that has been embodied by the survivors as primary witnesses from now on 'have to be re-created and re-experienced in a mediated form, in a new media setting' for later generations (2015, 37).

The digitalization of sound and image in the cinema has undisputedly stimulated a growing theoretical and technical interest in the human body and the senses; the corporeal and the sensual became relevant in their radical difference from the abstract, synthetic, digital code, and also as the main target of the simulative immersive 3D technologies and audio surround effects (Elsaesser 2016, 53). CGI, visual effects and complex sound technology ensure that new movies are 'machines of generating affect' (Shaviro 2010, 3); they produce more effective sensual assaults with the help of software technologies, which guarantee 'radically new ways of manufacturing and articulating lived experiences' (Shaviro 2010, 16). These technologies also affect memory politics and practices of commemoration. The three East European movies I will discuss, all handle photographic, filmic documents like medial 'memory anchors.' In *Son of Saul*, *Regina* and *Warsaw Uprising* the original archival materials continue to preserve their status of historical document, while Nemes, Komasa and Groó connect private, personal and public aspects, consciously mixing the analog and digital photographic and filmic media to construct 'post memory' products. As a result of these performances 'in and with visual media' (Kuhn 2010, 6), the past is not only present as a topic or a story, but is sensually embodied by the respective photographic or

cinematic medium; through these comes the ability to communicate emotional, corporeal experiences, and to transmit bodily sensations of past, traumatic events.

Remediating the 'sense memory' of the archival image

Art historian, Jill Bennett, introduced the idea of 'sense memory' to distinguish the ordinary, narrative, representational memory from the affective memory of traumatic events. Quoting psychologist Pierre Janet, and trauma researcher Bessel Van der Kolk, Bennett states that while narrative memory expresses thinking processes through language, traumatic memory has a layer that 'lies outside verbal-semantic-linguistic representation' (Bennett 2003, 28). Recalling the confessions of Holocaust survivor and poet Charlotte Delbo, Bennett describes this type of memory as 'deep' and 'affective', that 'operates through the body to produce a kind of "seeing truth" rather than "thinking truth", registering the pain of memory as it is directly experienced and communicated on a level of bodily affect' (2003, 29). Sense memory, in Bennett's approach, is a source of poetics, and belongs to a conception of art (e.g. as seen in medieval art), not aiming to reproduce the world, but to register and produce affect, a phenomenon also theorized by Gilles Deleuze through the writings of Marcel Proust (Deleuze 1972). Bearing the physical imprints of an event, sense memory, as Bennett elaborates,

involves not so much *speaking of* but *speaking out of* a particular memory or experience—in other words, speaking from the body *sustaining sensation* (...) (It) does not just present the horrific scene, the graphic spectacle of violence, but the physical imprint of the ordeal of violence: a (compromised and compromising) position to see *from* (2003, 33–34, emphasis in original).

These inner, sensual, deep, unintelligible sensations are primarily conserved by the mind and bodies of traumatized subjects, although the sense memory is particularly approachable by the visual arts, such as painting and photography, as Bennett suggests. Following this thread, it is highly imaginable how archive images can also preserve in various forms 'sense memories' of traumatic events in various forms. I argue that this 'sense memory' of the archival sources is a main point of reference for the films of Nemes, Komasa and Groó, as they seek for those intimate, sensual details, inner points of view encapsulated in the visual documents of the victims, which can also serve as entry points for a wider audience. This special interest and intense engagement with affective qualities is very close to Assmann's description of the empathy frame of memory transmission, characteristic for the new millennium. According to Assmann (2015, 33) empathy mode 'provides (...) more distance than the identification frame and more proximity than the ethical frame'. While these two frames of transmission were defined by the collective 'we'-group of intergenerational family connections or national origin, empathic mode offers an individual approach, open to all those who do not share any national, diasporic or family connections with the Holocaust. Empathy for Assmann presupposes knowledge and imagination, but it is distinguished from compassion or sympathy; it involves a conscious separation of the self from the other by 'creating a sensibility for the suffering of others under the premise that the observer could be subject to the same pain' (Assmann 2015, 33). Due to the temporal distance and the lack of personal or family links, empathy mode is open to anybody lacking direct connections with either the victims or the perpetrators.

I argue that *Son of Saul*, *Regina* and *Warsaw Uprising* achieve the affective involvement of spectators by the special treatment of photographic, filmic documents used as sensual ‘memory anchors’. Nemes, Komasa and Groó maintained the historical documentary value of original archival materials, while they succeeded to unwrap the simultaneous public, collective relevance and personal implication of these records. The films address spectator empathy by clinging to the sensual details, bodily sensations, and inner points of view, namely, the ‘sense memory’ encapsulated in the visual evidence. Before examining the details and techniques of the three movies’ cinematic memory work, I shall address the question of the historical archive, as these materials have provided strong inspiration for the filmmakers, but remediating them implies special consequences.

Archive footage and photographs of the WWII atrocities have a privileged status in a contemporary, temporally distant, post-witness, post memory era, and have, as Barthes suggests a ‘having-been-there’ quality (Barthes 1977); they embody a material connection, an ‘umbilical cord’ between the past and present, in the most classic Peircean, indexical sense (Hirsch 2001, 15). Although this unquestionable value of direct evidence goes against the idea of ‘lost referentiality’ in a ‘post-photographic’ era (Mitchell 1992, 49), the inclusion of these original photo-filmic materials in cinematic artworks risks, not so much hurting their authenticity, but also the alteration of their original meaning. Using archival images and documents always foregrounds the artificial, edited nature of any artwork and the constructed nature of memory, as Dagmar Brunow in his book on documentary filmmaking and archival intervention subsumes:

Archival footage (...) raises question of memory, its media specificity and the way memory travels, how it is adapted, translated and appropriated. It invites us to reflect on the role of documentary film images for the construction of memory, on their alleged status as visible evidence and on the ontology of image (Brunow 2015, 1).

Holocaust-related archive documents are ambivalent sources, as they may reveal many otherwise hidden details, but may also exclude important, historical, contextual information (Didi-Huberman 2008, 66–67; Ebbrecht-Hartmann 2016), giving way to misunderstandings and misinterpretations. In approaching this special corpus of archives, Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartmann draws attention to the necessity of examining any Holocaust-related visual document in three dimensions: the content, the context and the appropriation all. All have to be considered, researched and taken-into-account, because the status and character of any archive film is not sealed, and often may change with time. The automaticity of technology and indexical power of photographic and filmic documents seem to guarantee immediacy and veracity, but as with all images, archival ones also have a hidden, initial, contextual frame that is not always easily reproduced or traced down. Besides this, any remediation, be it a medially hidden ‘immediacy’, when the medium erases itself, leaving only the strong impression of the represented object, or a transparent ‘hypermediacy’, when the presence of the medium and the process of mediation are made visible (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 70–71), implies alterations in denotation, which adds further complications of meaning when working with archive materials. Michael Zyrd described this ambiguity coded in the archive material as a ‘spatial and temporal incompleteness’, an amount of missing information about what happened ‘out of frame’, before, after and during the recording:

Into what story is the image inserted and how is that image implicitly and explicitly harnessed for a historical narrative? (...) History does not reside, in a simplistic way, *in* the image; the capacity of the image to serve as historical evidence lies in its contextual framing, what we have been told (or what we recognize) about the image (Zyrd 2003, 47).

While Brunow, Ebbrecht-Hartmann and Zyrd pointed to the incompleteness enclosed in any type of archive material, which opens the possibility of fabrications, manipulations and misuses, Bennett's concept of sense memory is directly attached to the subtle, affective experience, accidentally and involuntarily registered and documented thematically *in* and stylistically *by* the indexical, archive image. These sensations may be carried by every archival photographic or filmic source; the three movies in discussion use various, explicit and reflective medial strategies to catch and enhance the 'sense memory' of their archival sources. This is only one aspect of a larger, complex 'post memory work' these films fulfill, as all the events evoked have ended with the violent death of the characters seen on the archival images. Their stories, belonging to a wider, transnational Holocaust and WWII narrative became sensibly embedded in the present Hungarian, Polish or Jewish memory culture. Taking-into-account the technological contexts, I propose to identify these explorable strategies of remediation as the 'post memory work' of Nemes', Komasa's and Groó's films, performed through different digital postproduction processes. Addressing in detail the medial framing of the archive materials, and the interplays of immediacy and hypermediacy in the following sections, I will examine the ways in which the three films activate the empathy mode and sense memory.

***Son of Saul*: the phenomenological trauma and indexical drama of documenting**

Post-communist Holocaust remembrance in Hungary was never unproblematic and was often reflected by anti-Semitic public discourses and political rhetoric. *Son of Saul*'s topic, international success and its powerful representational strategy posed a real challenge for extremists in the domestic audience.⁴ Clara Royer and László Nemes' script was inspired by *The Scrolls of Auschwitz*, the secretly written and buried diaries of some Sonderkommando members, a special group of Jewish prisoners who were forced to participate in the extermination processes in the crematoria. As Nemes declared, he was also deeply affected by the four Sonderkommando photographs, and decided to integrate the moment of picture taking 'in the heart of the film' (Baeque 2015). These pictures, called 'images in spite of all' by art historian Georges Didi-Huberman⁵ (2008) were taken before the Sonderkommando rebellion (August, 1944), and are recognized by many historians as among 'the most astonishing of the various artifacts to have emerged from Auschwitz. In terms of visual record, they are unquestionably the most important documents that we have' (Stone 2001, 132). Two of the original shots (nr. 280 and 281) were taken from inside the gas chambers, showing the corpses and some working Sonderkommando members; the other two (nr. 282 and 283) show outside locations, showing some naked women in the foreground, who seem to be preparing to enter the gas chamber; shot nr. 283 also 'documents' the lack of careful targeting, the photographer's unsuccessful attempt to catch the same scene. Although the pictures only became publicly known after 1945, the copies (developed from the negatives smuggled out in a toothpaste tube by Polish resistance members) usually were published

in retouched and cropped versions. The authentic format, size and exact framing of the pictures—their ‘phenomenology’ (Didi-Huberman 2008, 36)—visually indicate the special and dangerous circumstances of shooting, but these details only became visible in 1985, when the original versions were discovered.

Son of Saul follows one day of a Sonderkommando member’s life in the Auschwitz concentration camp. While the group secretly plans a rebellion and escape, Saul, the protagonist, seeks to bury the body of his supposed son, a young Jewish boy who miraculously survived gasification, but was finally killed by an SS officer. At a given moment, risking their lives, Saul and one of his fellow prisoners take some photographs in the camp, documenting the mass extermination of the Jews. Besides dramatizing the photo-taking action, Nemes’ movie adopts the visual style, namely the strong, affective ‘sense memory’ conveyed by the original Sonderkommando photographs: the ‘physical imprint of violence’, the perspective of ‘seeing from’ the witness’ point of view (Bennett 2003, 33), transmitting the tension of horror and trembling, the ‘attack on the senses’ (Stone 2001, 135), which is documented thematically *in* and medially *by* the original photographs. Nemes’ movie looks like a cinematic extension of the phenomenology of these pictures, adapting both what and how it is seen on them: the set, the actions, the hiding attitude, the darkness, the poor targeting, the rush and the emotional confusion become the basic components of *Son of Saul*’s whole audiovisual universe.

The pictures shot in the diegetic situation are certainly not identical to the archival ones, and the scene is totally blurred by smoke; but the specific, incidental focalization and compositional arrangement of the original Sonderkommando photographs is reproduced and incorporated in some of the scenes’ emblematic framings in a more direct way. First of all, on a more essential level, these photographs’ way of looking at things is interiorized by Saul, as his way of looking resembles the vision of a photographic camera eye: targeted to focus sharply on the closest foreground, and blurring the background (other people, the environment and corpses, called ‘Stücke’ by the SS officers). This lifeless ‘technological’ gaze was ruled by horror and fear (appearing also on photographs no. 282 and 283) and seems to be closely connected with Saul’s mechanic movement and emotionless attitude, enunciating a certain physical closeness, yet constant psychological distance from the events (Stone 2001, 132). Beside this, the first two photographs (nr. 280 and nr. 281) have a thick and black inner frame, the ‘subjective’ point of view, which indicates a hidden position in the darkness of the gas chambers, and a view directed outside through a visible doorframe (Figure 1), is applied in two dramaturgically important scenes of the movie. The inspection of the miraculously surviving boy appears with a very similar composition and framing. Saul is hiding in the background and watching from a distance, while the SS doctor is suffocating the still breathing body (Figure 2). Saul’s general ‘seeing’ without intention, in this moment turns into ‘watching’, focusing with real attention, although he usually tries not to watch what is going on around him. Later, one of the final scenes repeats this inner framing, and this time it is again associated with death. After their escape, the prisoners take some rest in a shelter in the middle of the woods. Saul suddenly observes a young Polish boy, stepping in the doorway; he reacts with a smile, the first and last one we see on his face, before being executed by the Nazi chasers. These two scenes, together with the re-enactment of the action of taking the pictures, situate the Sonderkommando photographs in a narrative filmic situation, where their cinematic integration is completed through a repeated shot–reverse-shot composition, which reinforces the phenomenology of the audience being



Figure 1. Sonderkommando photograph No. 280 framed by the gas chamber's visible doorframe (1944).

present then and there. The added reaction shots turn the viewer's attention towards the 'other' side, showing the original Sonderkommando photographer's point of view, suturing together the archive photographic and the actual cinematographic apparatuses through this imaginative gesture. It is also part of this cinematographic 'post memory work' as in the diegetic minute of photographing the growing smoke suddenly blocks the visibility: Saul and his fellows can only stare in the grey fog that seems to wrap everything. This moment,



Figure 2. Watching the inspection of the miraculously surviving boy in Nemes' *Son of Saul*.

as the medial, phenomenological embodiment of traumatic rupture in the filmic diegesis, freezes the action and narration, indicating the limits of representing everything.

Picture nr. 283 has an accidental, oblique composition with the famous birch trees and is recalled when Saul gets in a car to leave the camp in a hazardous private mission to find the Greek rabbi in the neighborhood. The natural environment and the close, intimate view of green leaves and branches ambiguously refer to freedom and danger, as nature provides a temporary escape from the horrors of the camp, but provokes a more severe surveillance of the prisoners. The almost nonfigurative, blurred, indiscernible sight of the trees later reappears in some subjective views, as the branches hit against the running bodies of the fugitives at the end of the film. The mental state of fear, panic and extreme tension expressed in the immediate body gestures, and documented in every Sonderkommando photograph, is remediated in *Son of Saul's* representation politics, which aims to offer a visceral, intimate and sensually intensive insight into concentration camp life and atrocities—the 'phenomenology of trauma' (Vincze 2015). Nemes' script is faithful to historical facts as through the story of a fictitious character (Saul) it presents Sonderkommando members primarily, not as collaborators, but as witnesses and chroniclers in the extreme conditions of crematoria, where the act of taking a photograph was a collective, advisedly organized protest of a whole community.⁶

Nemes, who considered the digital revolution a regression, decided to use 35 mm film stock, because the 'magic of cinema' in his vision could only be maintained by 'the chemical medium, the uncertainty of the image, the grain structure making it move from one image to the next' (Macnab 2015). Nemes' choice to use 35 mm film and an 1.375:1 academic aspect ratio for *Son of Saul* opens a dialogic interface between the past, present and future of the photofilmic medium, as it thematizes analog indexicality by mirroring, even re-enacting the Sonderkommando photographic operation, yet it revives the story's sensual atmosphere by making use of a digitally mixed, refined sound design.⁷ In this way, the limited, elliptic visibility is accompanied by a constant polylingual cacophony and other

off-screen sounds and noises, and has an enormous role to play in creating the invisible off-screen space of the concentration camp, mainly by grasping another layer of the sense memory encoded in the written and visual documents.⁸ Thus, the digital postproduction ‘manufacturing and articulating lived experience’ (Shaviro 2010, 16) enhances the affective and sensual qualities by adding sonic, aural—not visual—software effects.

Upgrading the archive: immediacy through hypermediacy in the *Warsaw Uprising*

The reconstruction of the archival footage shot during the Warsaw Uprising was one of the many important projects used to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of this tragic episode in modern Poland’s national history. Komasa’s war documentary was made entirely from archive materials, originally filmed as newsreel, by the Polish Home Army’s crew in the 63 days of Warsawian resistance against the Nazi occupation. The surviving, 6-h long footage in the last 70 years has been lost, found and re-edited several times in the last 70 years. Being part of a project hosted by the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the original black and white material first was restored,⁹ and then underwent a careful colorization and sonorization process. Historians supervised the restoration of the colors, checking the factual accurateness of every detail (e.g. the dyes used at the time, identified urban sites, buildings, foods, etc.). All the sounds of the city and fighting were carefully reconstructed in the studio, by applying the same types of guns and explosives; while the on-screen characters’ dialogues were reproduced by lip-reading specialists, and finally dubbed by contemporary Polish actors.

While *Son of Saul*’s fictional story was based on some written diaries and photographs, Komasa’s movie relies entirely on documentary footage and constructs a fictitious plot, based on a new script¹⁰ dramatizing the fight and perseverance of the Polish insurgents. All the action was accompanied by two fictitious cameramen’s monologues and comments, namely, Karol and his brother, Witek, who interact with and ‘talk to’ insurgents, who seem to react to ‘answer’ them. Komasa’s scriptwriters choose to incorporate the originally invisible and unknown cameramen in these two characters, envisioning them as the constantly present persons, who can connect all the filmed events and all persons passing in front of their camera.¹¹ The emotions, reactions and the phenomenology of the continuous corporeal presence of Karol and Witek are expressed verbally and translated kinetically into unstable camera positions, with shaking and falling movements during the waves of explosions, where detonations pulsate in the sudden twitches of the image, and the filmmaker’s hiding position is reflected, in many cases, through the partial views of the streets and buildings (Figure 3).

When discussing war photography, Marta Zarzycka raises the problem of the ‘inaudibility’ of these pictures, which ‘are not populated by deaf and mute characters that move about in soundless space, but rather suggest sounds (even though those sounds lack physicality)’ (2012, 44). Sounds can evoke the horrors and trauma of war more sensually than visual materials do; thus, they are capable of actively stimulating affective engagement. On the other hand, Ebbrecht-Hartmann mentions how music and added comments frequently accompany the use of Holocaust-related archival footage from this period, since originals were ‘preserved often as mute remnants (that) provoke (...) the use of additional sound or



Figure 3. Filming the gunfights from the protection of a window in Komasa's *Warsaw Uprising*.

voice over in order to frame and contain the footage' (2016). In the case of *Warsaw Uprising* the reconstructed sounds, the carefully re-created sonic atmosphere, ambient noise and speech sequences undoubtedly accentuate the phenomenological, documentary quality of the archival source; final re-editing seems to work against this authenticity by subordinating the rearranged material to fictive monologues of the imagined, fictional filmmakers.

These two characters have a central role in the creation of the 'empathy mode' of memory transmission, as Komasa's documentary seeks to create those entry points, through which anybody can engage from inside with the insurgent's position and the 'perspective of the victims' (Assmann 2015, 34). Thus, the cameramen are envisioned as 'raisonneurs', classically defined as characters by 'whom the author speaks' (Hancock 1974, 124); the type of narrators who remain part of the action, although they do not have direct effect on it. Komasa's film offers them a vocal embodiment; they remain invisible, but their fictionalized and vocalized agency has a strong interpretative power over the archive material, as their conversation and comments constantly negotiate the meaning of what is seen on the silent footage, whether they are instructing filmed people, or guessing their motivation, in many cases, by giving expression to a contemporary, trauma- and heroism-focused interpretation.

With all the communicated¹² carefulness for historic authenticity and the seriousness of the scientific background research, the archive material appears to be the historically precious, raw source made even more spectacular through audio-visual and technological upgrades, accompanied, at the same time, by a 'documentary downgrade'. Polish media

scholar, Wiesław Godzic, claimed that *Warsaw Uprising* finally takes the shape of a strange mixture of authentic and inauthentic, fictive elements, that cause confusion, and create a 'metafilm with docu-dramatic elements' (Godzic 2016, 68). He criticizes the way real and invented filmmakers interact 'in variable dramaturgical structure with the on-screen, actual, insurgents' (68–69), therefore, the voice-over destined authentic, turns into 'authoritative', and presents a desired, revised 'supertruth' (69). Although the cameramen's comments, in many cases, are personally or professionally self-reflective, Komasa's film leaves no traces of the potentially polysemous meaning of the original, fragmentary footage, excluding any reflective mark about its own way of (hyper)mediating the archive.

Warsaw Uprising is made up of various episodes of wartime life under constant German attacks, when traumatic experience and sense of loss was present, even when temporarily invisible. The original archive footage documented the flow of the everyday life, funerals, weddings, gun construction, cooking and flirting, but also depicted starvation, hopelessness, horror and death. The archive documentary invites a certain spectatorial engagement, which is particularly challenged by the remediation techniques used in Komasa's film. Building on Vivian Sobchack's argument to understand the 'documentary,' not only as a genre, but also 'as a mode of reception, as an experience' (Baron 2012, 104), Jaimie Baron proposed in such cases to take into account the 'archive effect' of archive or discovered footage, which is the particular effect or consciousness generated by the viewer's perception of the respective material being produced in a different historical moment, thus embodying the phenomenological 'contrast between "then" and "now"' (105). *Warsaw Uprising* challenges this 'archive effect' by perplexing the viewer¹³ with the simultaneity of a surprisingly colourful, noisy, vivid immediacy unpacked from the original black and white, decaying, silent material and the uncanniness of hidden mediation, the medial inorganic nature of the digitally added tints, hues, voices and sounds. These effects enhance the sense memory encoded in the archive for a contemporary audience, living in a new media environment, marked by speed, never ending entertainment and hyperstimulation of the senses. *Warsaw Uprising's* 'post memory work' stands in using historical documentary footage to open up past traumatic experiences, even on the price of manipulating the incompleteness of the archive, indicated by Zyrđ (2003) and Brunow (2015), in order to display a regular, grand narrative.

Connecting individual biography and transnational archive: *Regina*

Hungarian filmmaker, Diána Groó's, documentary presents the story of Regina Jonas (1902–1944), the first properly ordained woman rabbi, who finally was allowed to hold services in the Nazi persecuted Berlin, before being deported to Terezin, and later dying in Auschwitz. Her unique achievements and heritage were collectively forgotten for more than five decades, when the personal documents, papers and letters—that she personally handed to the Jewish community center before her deportation—were finally discovered.¹⁴ Historian Stefanie Sinclair considered Jonas' story to be a special mnemonic case shaped by the 'processes of remembering, forgetting and identity formation' (2013, 542). Conducting research on the possible reasons for the total silence around her heritage, Sinclair observed that the extreme and desperate conditions of her ordination in 1935, together with the gender bias, which usually caused women's marginalization in historiography, and the 'forceful forgetting' that followed Shoah as an impact of the trauma (549–557), all seemed to work against keeping her memory alive, even by those who were familiar with her and her work.

Apart from Elisa Klapheck's 1999 monograph on Regina Jonas, Groó had a single visual source for her documentary: two, almost identical looking, full figure studio photographs of Jonas,¹⁵ wearing a similar black cap and robe, holding a book in her hand (Figures 4). Using authentic written documents revealed by Klapheck, Groó structured her film according to the linear chronology of Jonas' life, negotiating the lack of any other visual recording or survivor testimony by an extended vocal embodiment and various inserted pieces of



Figure 4. One of the two surviving photographs of Regina Jonas (1936).

archival footage. Besides some well-known shots (e.g. Hitler watching Jesse Owens at the Olympic games), Groó compiled photographs and silent footage collected by herself from different German, American, Czech and Polish films and family archives, as she was looking for pictures of Jewish girls and women living in Berlin, Warsaw and Kraków between the 1920s and 1940s. The original Jonas portrait serves as a visual memory anchor, strengthening the connection between the archival pieces of different origin, and it reappears from time to time, in various forms: cut out from the original photograph, her figure sometimes appears as an inserted background or foreground, floating in the streets of Berlin.

Employing a different strategy than Komasa, Groó's hypermediation is transparent, as she does not attempt to hide her documentary's composite nature. She is equally interested in creating a *Zeitgeist* atmosphere by showing miscellaneous private and public archive footage about the shop windows and passages of Berlin streets, ordinary people and ordinary actions. She added popular period hits and traditional Jewish songs and, by slowing down and sonorizing the silent shots, she also caught the phenomenological, sensual side of such ephemeral, everyday details, such as the arrival of a train, the opening an umbrella or pouring out a bucket of water. These aspects, even if not explicitly traumatic, outline the overall picture and general mood of the 1930s bit by bit, which were sensed in Berlin under the shadow of the growing Nazi party.

The two low-key, laconic, black and white photographs of Jonas at first hardly convey any sense of memory; affective aspects rather appear as Groó projects the vocalized layers of various written recollections, letters and articles, and sensual, visual layers of her handwriting, and other archive footages. Thus, Regina's thoughtful, camera-shy face and outlook become gradually enriched with intimate nuances of her personality, while Groó mediates and opens her subjective, intimate perspective for empathic engagement. Jonas' positive and optimistic attitude in the middle of her struggles as the first woman rabbi of the Jewish community, hide and cover the deeply interiorized trauma of the gradually strengthening anti-Semitism and the personal experience of concentration camps.

As Regina is visually present only in the form of two photographs, the many different girls and women appearing on the archive footage generate an uncertainty in the viewer about the real protagonist of the story. This is first exposed in the school scene, when Groó accompanies the voice-over of a schoolmate's recollection of the young Regina, Groó accompanies this with footage of a girl reading and writing; despite the possible resemblance, we suddenly realize that this girl cannot be Regina, as no preserved film records now exist; at the same time, even if she is not Regina, the story of this radiantly smart, young Jewish girl presumably had many common aspects with Regina Jonas' life. Likewise, Groó showed various shots of young Jewish women during the film; thus, we see many different gestures, body postures, moods, clothes, hairstyles, hats, and aspects of the young girls and women reading and walking, while every word of the voice-over is a quotation from Jonas's documents, or based on Klapheck's monograph. Using this technique, Groó managed to extend the frames of Regina Jonas' identity and personal story into a collective, East-European Jewish intellectual, female fate. Groó maintained a freedom and playfulness in decelerating and freezing the footage, panning, zooming in with Burns effect¹⁶ into photographs, and mixing amateur footage with official archive material. Her remediation strategy was open and self-revealing, a total opposite of Komasa's war documentary; by hypermediacy she achieved immediacy, creating a sensual atmosphere of Berlin before and during the Nazi regime.

Visual techniques were accompanied by a refined sound engineering, with added sound and voices, Groó built a different phenomenological authenticity. Black and white photographs and silent footage were supplied with a sonic atmosphere and ambient noises (e.g. the sounds of traffic, rain and wind, beating the carpet, turning the page in a book, etc.), and vocal embodiment of the different characters evoked in the documents (friends, professors, pupils, parents and journalists). The written testimonies, letters, newspaper articles are read both by actors and non-professionals, including the filmmaker's own Hungarian grandmother, an eighty-six-year old concentration camp survivor.¹⁷ This adds a different, non-visual indexical layer of authenticity to the commemoration of Jonas' life story, through which Groó, not only re-connected the individual into the collective, but re-qualified her documentary, as she declared: 'it is not about Holocaust, it is about surviving' (Dekel 2013).

Conclusion

Relating to Bennett's sense memory concept, this analysis has explored the medial, photo-filmic mnemonic techniques *Son of Saul*, *Warsaw Uprising* and *Regina* used in recalling WWII events, and individual and collective traumas. The investigation revealed that 'post memory work' in these films was performed on three different, but deeply interdependent levels. Cinematic integration (1) of archive photographic and filmic documents as 'memory anchors' (Kobrynsky and Bayer 2015, 7) was achieved by the audio-visual re-staging or framing of the still, silent photographs (*Son of Saul* and *Regina*) and restoring the raw, mute shots (*Warsaw Uprising*). In all the cases, documents were invigorated with a sensual, vibrant sonic atmosphere, and they were also accompanied by a vocal embodiment of the involved protagonists (*Regina*) or invisible main characters (*Warsaw Uprising*). At the same time, each movie practiced a phenomenological adaptation (2) of the witness' perspective and sense memory documented *in* and *by* the photographic gaze (Didi-Huberman 2008, 36). The films actively engaged with the 'eyewitness as chronicler' role, embedded in the archive source, and expressed in a physical, psychic and sensual point of view, endowing the witness with face, voice, corporeal presence, to which the spectator, as secondary witness, could relate. These characters documented their contemporary, often traumatic events by taking photographs (Saul), shooting film (Karol and Witek from Warsaw), or writing and collecting written and visual documents (Regina Jonas) with the clear intention to preserve and pass them on to future generations. Whether attached to a fictional character (Saul Ausländer), a real, identified person (Regina Jonas) or semi-identified people (the cameramen or citizens in *Warsaw Uprising*), these cinematic techniques, not only preserve and mediate the individual, personal stories, but manage to extend their availability and validity into a general, collective level. Memory work also appears in the medial/material embodiment of violence, loss, damage and trauma (3), carried visibly by the film's structure and texture. By these medial 'post memory work' techniques, the films reach the sense memory encapsulated in the silent archival image or footage, while the interplay of immediacy and hypermediacy works against total immersion, and helps the viewer to keep a reflexive distance. This, not only fits the 'empathy mode' of memory transmission attributed by Assmann to the 'post-witness' era, but also works against the often declared 'desensitization process' of losing empathy towards the Holocaust and WWII trauma. Geoffrey Hartman (1996), Susan Sontag (1989)

and Marianne Hirsch (2001) amongst many others, noticed the temporary loss of sympathy and moments of saturation, which often thwart affective remembrance, as decontextualized and overused visual documents often work against commemoration, contributing rather to 'remembering to forget' (Zelizer 1998). *Son of Saul*, *Warsaw Uprising* and *Regina* demonstrate that the possibility of connecting potentially available, dead cultural 'storage memory' with active, living 'functional memory' (Assmann 2011) is always open through the awakening of the sense memory of the archive.

Notes

1. 'Scrolls of Auschwitz' refers to eight stocks of documents written by five known authors, all members of Sonderkommando. These writings were buried in the grounds of crematoria at Auschwitz, and were recovered between 1945 and 1980. Historian Ber Mark transcribed and published several of these manuscripts under the title *Megiles Oyshvits*, which later was translated into English as the 'Scrolls of Auschwitz'. See Mark and Avrech (1985).
2. E.g. Marianne Hirsch herself raised the idea of broadening the validity of postmemorial form of remembrance that 'needs not to be restricted to the family, or even to a group that shares an ethnic or national identity marking' (Hirsch 2001, 9–10).
3. For a critical analysis of empathy and/or identification with the victims in Holocaust and trauma discourses of Walter Benjamin, Dominick LaCapra, Giorgio Agamben and Margarete Mitscherlich see Meek (2011, 133–170).
4. László Nemes, living, learning and working for many years abroad, initially planned *Son of Saul* to be a French production. As the possibility of French, German and Israeli coproduction later failed, the new Hungarian Film Fund became *Son of Saul's* main sponsor. Hungarians celebrated happily the international success of the film, but it also generated a wave of anti-Semitic comments. While latent anti-Semitism is often exploited by current Hungarian political rhetoric, many native historians and intellectuals criticize official memory politics for the lack of self-examination of the country's own role in WWII atrocities against the Hungarian Jews. Ferenc Török's black-and-white fiction film *1945* (2016) recently addressed the problem of Hungarian rural population's responsibility in the deportation of Jews.
5. László Nemes also declares the influence of Georges Didi-Huberman's book on the Sonderkommando photographs, originally published in France: Didi-Huberman, Georges. 2003. *Images malgré tout*. Paris: Minuit (see Baeque 2015).
6. Alter Szmul Fajnzylberg, one of the Sonderkommando survivors declared: 'I want to emphasize once again that when these pictures were taken, all the prisoners I mentioned were present. In other words, even though the Greek Jew, Alex, was the person who pressed the shutter, one can say that the pictures were taken by all of us' (see Stone 2001, 132).
7. Nearly 80% of the sounds of *Son of Saul* (human voices, sound environments) were created in postproduction. Sound designer Tamás Zányi won Vulcan Prize (Cannes) and Golden Reel Award for his work in this film.
8. For a detailed analysis of the movie's complex sound design, and the applied sound perspectives (see Vincze 2015).
9. During the restoration process dirt, dust, holes and markers were first removed, without deforming, damaging the image; this was followed by a stabilization process, that made possible the examination of small details, micro-movements, gestures unnoticed on the originally shaking, instable image. For other details see the movie's press book: <http://warsawrising-the-film.com/media>
10. The script was co-written by Jan Ołdakowski, Władysław Pasikowski, Joanna Pawluśkiewicz and Piotr C. Śliwowski.
11. Milenia Fiedler, one of the editors of *Warsaw Uprising* summarizes the process in this way: 'Insurgents appear on the screen too briefly to fully tell their story. This sparked the idea of

the film protagonist to be a person who does not appear in the take, but whose presence, emotions and actions are recorded by the camera operator on film. We have edited the material not as an objective recording of reality but *subjective truth about the person who experienced this reality*.’ (emphasis mine) See in the press book: <http://warsawrising-thefilm.com/media>

12. Beside the press book, the project was accompanied by various paratexts (explanations, descriptions, interviews) released on the film’s webpage and in the extras of its DVD edition.
13. The press book reflects on the dissonance of adding colors to the black-and-white archival footage, and reveals the desired effect: ‘Adding color reduces the distance and the historical events acquire a new dimension. They simply become real. The past—as Cyprian Kamil Norwind once postulated—becomes the present, “only somewhat further away.” (...) Looking at the archival material used in this feature film we experience a cognitive dissonance – while it still represents an important page in Poland’s history, the film looks as if it were shot contemporary with the help of film set designers, costume experts, abundance of authentic props and numerous visual effects.’ <http://warsawrising-thefilm.com/media>
14. The main primary source of information about Jonas is the collection of papers (letters, newspaper articles about and by her, scripts of talks, and a copy of her dissertation) discovered in the early 1990s. Her monographer, Elisa Klapheck ‘got the impression [that Jonas] designed her legacy. She was very aware of what she wanted to leave for the [...] word. She took into consideration that one day someone will come and find and write about her’ (fragment from an oral interview with Klapheck, conducted by Sinclair and quoted in Sinclair 2013, 543).
15. The reproductions of the two, almost identically looking photographs (made in 1936 and 1939) were published in Elisa Klapheck’s book: Klapheck, Elisa. 1999. *Fräulein Rabbiner Jonas: kann die Frau das rabbinische Amt bekleiden?* Teetz: Hentrich and Hentrich.
16. The effect was named after American documentarian Ken Burns, and refers to slow panning and zooming on still photographs embedded in motion pictures.
17. As Groó confessed: ‘At the end, when she is speaking about how they could survive in the concentration camps, I was 100% sure I don’t want to use actors for the voice-overs. I wanted to use someone who really knows what it is about and my grandmother, although she did not know Regina Jonas, she really knows the meaning of a concentration camp and surviving, and feeling, and talking about this feeling that she also felt at that time at the age of 17.’ (Dekel 2013)

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ORCID

Beja Margitházi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4440-5136>

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